

## FOREWORD

Wetlands are essential to the well-being of hundreds of species of migratory waterbirds, worldwide. If the world's wetlands are not conserved, these waterbird populations will not persist. Whilst the need for human development of land and natural resources is acknowledged, it is also accepted that such development should be carried out in a wise and sustainable manner. As decisions are made regarding wetlands and development, perpetuating their sustainable use by migratory waterbirds must remain an important consideration. How we determine the priorities for the conservation of waterbirds and wetlands is a complex and difficult question. Addressing that question is the aim of this workshop.

It is essential, as discussions of wetland conservation expand to recognise their many ecological functions and human values, that waterbirds continue to have an important place at the discussion table. Migratory waterbirds were one of the key issues in recognising the importance of wetlands, and in the establishment of the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau, the Asian Wetland Bureau and the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (that led to Wetlands for the Americas), which in 1996 merged to form Wetlands International. Also, waterbirds still play a central role in the designation of sites of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. Since those earlier years, many other issues have arisen, and we now appreciate wetlands for their many functions and human values. These considerations often take higher importance than do migratory waterbirds.

However, it is important to realise that waterbirds must remain a part of sustainable wetland development. Waterbirds themselves supply many human values, *e.g.* for hunting, for recreation and for their ecological roles. Waterbirds also pose many challenges, not the least of which is that most refuse to stay in one place. Although wetland management and conservation are local issues, most waterbirds use many wetlands, travelling among local wetlands and between national boundaries during the course of their annual cycle. So how do we go about matching the need for wise use of local wetlands with those of intercontinentally migrating birds? This workshop tried to deal with some of these difficult and highly technical problems and tried to see how this can fit into development. It examined international flyway approaches, monitoring and assessment methodologies, information needs and setting priorities for conservation actions.

It is hoped that the proceedings of this workshop provide a clearer path to identifying priorities at local, national and international levels and that the conclusions and recommendations are persuasive enough that waterbirds continue to have a place on the development agenda.

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